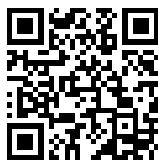

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*Should the University be the
Central Authority in a
Unified School System?*

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BEFORE THE ALAMEDA COUNTY
HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS' CLUB

By ALEXIS F. LANGE

[Reprinted from the UNIVERSITY CHRONICLE]

BERKELEY
The University Press
1899

SHOULD THE UNIVERSITY BE THE CENTRAL AUTHORITY IN A UNIFIED SCHOOL SYSTEM?

By ALEXIS F. LANGE.

The question you have asked me to discuss with you to-day resolves itself on analysis into two distinct components. One has reference to the whole of a possible or probable system of education; the other concerns itself with the relation of a part of such a system to whatever other parts there may be or may come to be. Interpreting further and assuming, rightly I take it, that the university spoken of is our State University and also that private institutions of whatever sort do not primarily enter into the discussion, I would restate the question more explicitly thus: if, as seems likely and certainly desirable, the educational system of our state should be made an organized whole, would it be well to vest the necessary authority in the State University?

I am well aware that some malicious pessimist or cynical expert in higher criticism might possibly arrive at this meaning: shall the University be allowed to go on unifying by usurping authority? In other words, shall we approve of the sort of unity and dominion that results when cannibal meets missionary? Still, whichever interpretation one may feel disposed to adopt at the outset, it is clear that the inquiry as to authority is inseparably bound up with the problem of unification. Obviously, too, the discussion of

the former will have to be preceded by a consideration of the latter. Moreover, the whole subject pertains to the future, a future perhaps remote as yet, and cannot, therefore, be treated dogmatically. It must be sufficient if we seek where we are likely to find, if we try to discover the goal toward which we ought to set our faces, by taking note of present conditions and tendencies as well as of some of the guiding principles that should determine the direction of our educational thought and institutional life.

In every state of the Union public education is now looked upon as primarily a state affair, because necessary to political well-being. The constitutions of all states, Delaware and New Hampshire excepted, compel legislatures to establish a system of public schools. All permit if they do not expressly provide for the extension of the principle of education at common expense to higher schools. Our own State Constitution, by creating common schools, by guaranteeing the perpetuity of the University of California, and by empowering the legislature and municipal or district authorities to establish high schools, evening schools, normal schools, and technical schools, carries the theory of state education well on toward its logical conclusion.

And the facts, as we are proud to know, begin to correspond to the theory. Everywhere in this state, high schools are bridging the gap between the common schools and the University. Sooner or later, in case it should become necessary, California will be ready to put all public secondary schools on an equally permanent and stable basis. A high school law similar to that of Massachusetts is no longer merely a remote possibility. We may confidently look forward to such state action as will guarantee a school system which shall be complete from the kindergarten to the Ph.D., and of which the vocational schools demanded by economic and social needs shall constitute an integral part; for a truly American system can only be one system, not many, as in Germany for instance, where there is an intentional fostering of social stratification.

It is less easy to prophesy concerning the outer and inner organization and unification of this one complete system of common schools, secondary schools, and the schools constituting the University. Nevertheless it is not difficult to discern the drift of things at any rate. Already the inner unity is much greater than the distribution of power among outward organizing and controlling agencies would lead one to expect. Beneath much outward difference there is growing community of thought, of feeling, and of purpose. Indeed we are not far, I think, from a common American educational ideal. The common schools are to prepare for life in its individual and social aspects; secondary schools and the universities are to have the same aim exactly. Each of these divisions is to be organized with reference to the common ideal, each is to be so articulated with the rest as to make it possible for all the sons and daughters of the commonwealth to grow up and rise stage by stage to the station to which God has called them. By conferences, by discussion, through voluntary association and coöperation, courses of study have been devised and are being devised with relation to this fundamental conception. The teachers all over this country, the university men included, are more and more shaping their teaching in accordance with a comprehensive view of national education. Special aims are being considered in the light of ultimate aims. In so far then as unification depends on recognition of one ultimate aim, on a realizing sense of the necessity of adapting courses and departments to this aim, in so far as it depends on a growing consciousness of common educational interests, on willingness to coöperate, on ambition to get a school system that will minister in the best way to the civilization of the whole country, unification is in a fair way of being realized. The right spirit is at work creating its own body and bringing about, not dead uniformity of practice, but a vital unity of structure, of educational means, of standards of scholarship, of teaching, of supervision, and of administration.

No wonder that this movement which is gaining strength everywhere—and in no state is it stronger than in the State of California—should find expression in a more and more insistent demand for the removal of obstacles and for a system of government and administration that shall promote unity of educational effort and that shall make the whole school system the most efficient agency for bringing about the reign of reason and righteousness and competent service in private and public life. There can be no such united fruitful effort as long as any part of the whole system may be abolished by local shortsightedness or caprice. Here a change in our State Constitution would be necessary. There can be no uniformly high standard of teaching as long as power to examine and certificate teachers is divided. Here another change would have to be made, at least in our Statute Law. Uniform excellence and coöperation are out of the question as long as teachers can be appointed for other reasons than fitness, or removed for other causes than unfitness. A tribe of nomads cannot do the work of civilization successfully, however strong the bonds of tribal sentiment and ideals, however worthy and active the individual members of the tribe. There can be no unity of administration and supervision as long as superintendents are elected at the time set for gubernational elections, and special preparation and special administrative ability are not regarded as the chief qualifications for the performance of their functions.

A partial remedy for evils like these would seem to be—centralized control by the people as a whole, by the state.

Now, much as we as a people are devoted to local self-government, the principle of state control is as well established as the principle that one of the functions of the state is to provide for a system of schools. In fact, the one is a necessary corollary of the other. Accordingly, the administrative system of every state, but one, has come to have a separate educational department headed by a separate chief officer. Our own Constitution and Political Code

furnish many examples of the application of this principle, the most striking being the clause in the High School Law compelling high schools to make provision for at least one course leading to the University. Moreover, wherever the state control principle has been questioned in the courts of the country, the courts have sustained it. Let me read two decisions which state this matter very clearly and forcibly and neither of which, it should be noted, makes state control contingent upon the granting of financial aid:—

“Essentially and intrinsically the schools in which are educated and trained the children who are to become the rulers of the commonwealth are matters of state and not of local jurisdiction. In such matters the state is a unit. The authority of schools and school affairs is not necessarily a distributive one to be exercised by local instrumentalities; but on the contrary it is a central power residing in the Legislature of the State. It is for the law-making power to determine whether the authority shall be exercised by a state board of education or distributed to county, township, or city organization throughout the state.” (State of Indiana *vs.* Haworth.)

“We may assert positively and without hesitation that school districts are but agents of the commonwealth and are made *quasi*-corporations for the sole purpose of the administration of the commonwealth’s system of public education.” (Ford *vs.* Kendall Borough School, Pa.)

It is quite in accord with such decisions that in New Jersey, Virginia, and Mississippi the state board of education appoints county superintendents, that in Virginia it has power to remove city superintendents and district trustees, that in Vermont and Alabama the state superintendent appoints the county superintendents and in New York local boards for normal schools.*

It is plain that in centralizing control we should be

*For some of the foregoing data I am indebted to W. C. Webster, *Centralizing Tendencies in Educational Administration*. 1897. Columbia University Publications.

doing nothing revolutionary, nothing that introduces a new principle, nothing that need disturb the shades of Patrick Henry and the heroes of Bunker Hill, at any rate not as long as there remains ample room for the exercise of local initiative and responsibility.

That we are actually progressing toward something like a central authority admits of little doubt, I believe. Centralization of power is one of the marked features of our state and national development. The current in education is only one aspect of a general movement from individualism toward some form of collectivism. The day may not be far hence, therefore, when the people of this state will delegate the functions now performed by many to a few, to a body that shall be entrusted not only with the duties performed now by the Superintendent of Public Instruction and by the State Board of Education, but with a great many more, such as organization of courses and departments for all grades of the whole system, control over the training of all teachers, the central supervision of all schools, the hearing of appeals, and the enforcement of school law, which, of course, as I indicated before, would be very different from what it is now. In other words, whoever or whatever body will act as agent of the state in the capacity of central authority, will exercise considerable legislative power with reference to the inner organization of the school system, a vast range of executive functions, and some measure of appellate jurisdiction.

In the light of such considerations as these, almost the only thing that remains for me to do is to enlarge upon the perfectly obvious answer they contain to the main question propounded for to-day's discussion. The University will not, could not, should not be the central authority whether in the near or distant future.

Leaving out of account the remote contingency that the voters of California might be called upon some day to decide between Tammany bossism and a university dictatorship, is it at all likely that the Legislature or the common will

expressed in a vote on a revised constitution would ever delegate the powers enumerated above to the University? The tendency to centralization, to mention only one reason for a negative answer, receives its impetus not so much from a desire to get the best administration as from its correlative, the desire to prevent the worst, by concentrating responsibility. Centralization and direct control by the commonwealth are parts of the same movement, which, it seems to me, is bound to continue. And even if the Board of Regents, to whom University men are directly responsible, were to be elected by popular vote, would it not still be hard to counteract the practical force of this provincial objection to their appointees: shall men who have come together from all parts of the world and who are by no means all Californianized rule over us?

But let us assume that the confidence of the people of California in their State University should go so far as to put in its charge the whole system of public education, could the University accept this charge with any prospect of success? Certainly not at present. The University is made up of men. It is not one person. Aside from the Regents, the Senate constitutes the University in its official sense. Over one hundred and fifty men are at present members of this body, a number that has to be subdivided in manifold ways even for the transaction of strictly University business. Suppose, however, the Senate could act quickly and as a unit, the multiplicity of duties involved is such that these could not be attended to by men each of whom has both hands more than full now. Waiving these points, reduce the number to that of a good working committee, relieve the members of other duties so as to give them time, can they have the detailed knowledge of affairs and of present conditions, general or local, that is necessary if the school system is to become the most efficient agency in the preparation of the youth of the state for life in its individual and social aspects? I doubt it very much.

Well, reduce the functions of the central authority,

confine them to administration and supervision. School administration requires special gifts, special training, and special experience. It is fast becoming a profession by itself. Is it at all reasonable to expect that professors of English, Latin, Greek, or even Pedagogy, would turn out to be proficient school administrators too? Then let University men at least supervise all teaching and the training of all teachers, the chair of Pedagogy serving as a correlating center. Now, I don't know but the professor of the science and art of teaching might do. The rest of us, I think, should beg to be excused. Child psychology is not the psychology of adolescence, nor this the psychology of mature minds and characters. Knowing a subject in a scientific sense and presenting it scientifically to adults is a matter very different from so adapting instruction and other educational means to each stage of growth that purposeful and powerful personalities may be looked for as the result. If there is more than one University man now who knows something about the didactics of his subject as a whole and about its relation to general educational theory and practice, it is owing to the fact that there has been more than one who has said to himself: honor and fame can wait, contributions to the sum total of human knowledge can wait, my most promising students must go to other teachers for their training for leadership; my nearest duty is to assist as best I can and know, in building up the school system of this state. Little by little experience has been gained, insight has come, helpful counsel has been given and received. There has come also the joy of seeing things grow, a wider outlook on life, a truer perspective, a deepened sense of professional and human fellowship, in short, ample compensation in many directions for what was given up. But while the self-imposed duty of school visitation has been productive of incalculable benefit to the visitors and the visited, I, for my part, have little hesitation in saying that, after all, men professionally trained for just such work could do better by the school system as a whole. The practical difficulties

alone, however, forbid any extension of the present scope of University supervision, to use an expression more convenient than precise.

If then for all these reasons the central authority cannot be vested in the University now, how about the future? The same objections apply while in one respect an additional one appears. Thanks partly to the work of this generation of teachers, the University of the future will be able to lay more stress than has been possible hitherto on special preparation for special ends in special fields. It will never surrender its own pedagogical function, I hope. But as high schools grow stronger, more and more general culture may be presupposed; university teachers will by degrees cease to be college teachers also. There will be fewer, not more men with experiential knowledge of the specific tasks devolving upon other schools.

Yes, but in the Greater University there will be a Teachers' College where men and women will be trained for administration and supervision. Could not all or at least a portion of the functions of a central authority be vested in its faculty? Not all, for the reasons already given; not a portion, for the additional reason that the University should be exposed as little as possible to the dangers lurking in the inevitable tendency to protect home industry.

No, the state is not likely to delegate the central authority to University men as such; these men could not exercise it if they would, whether at present or in the future.

Has not, however, the possibility been overlooked of vesting such authority in the Board of Regents who then might employ a body of men for purposes of administration and supervision, a body of men directly responsible to them? The answer to this question is that then the Regents would be no longer Regents of the University but of the whole school system, a reconstituted body with enlarged functions. This proposition would obviously be open to fewer objections than the one we are discussing. I believe though that a better plan still—merely to suggest another alternative,

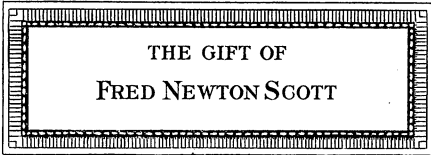
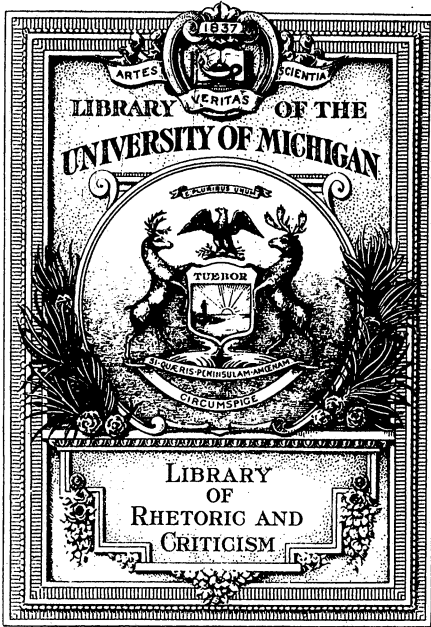
not to pose as a statesman—would be something like this: three non-partisan boards, one for each division of the school system; three directors, one for each division, appointed by their respective boards to serve during good behavior; the President of the University to be one of the three, of course, and the others, men of the same calibre, each with special qualifications for his particular duties; all three of them to be voting members *ex-officio* of each board, of which the governor would also be an *ex-officio* member; the state to be further represented by five or seven additional members for each board, who should serve at least five years each but not more than say ten. Joint sessions might be provided for at which a staff of school visitors might be appointed and their reports received and acted on.

Whether or not these are wild fancies of an idle brain, this is the direction our thoughts should take, I think, if we are casting about for a central authority that will ensure efficiency, coöperation between system and system, and the unhindered development of each according to its type. We must never allow ourselves to forget—and here lies really my main argument—that our school system is trinitarian not unitarian, that the three systems composing it are one in the sense that they all prepare for life in its individual and social aspects and so have enough in common to permit one to prepare for the others. They are one in the sense that each implies the rest and has no full existence without the rest. They are not one in the sense that each represents merely a lower or a higher stage than the others. They are coördinate systems and must be maintained as such. In thought, in learning, in the application of true principles to the problems of life and the riddles of the universe, the mission of a university is indeed to be a true authority, but—to the end that men may become their own authorities.

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN



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